

# AFO Assessment Team Work to Impress Legislature

Utah's animal feeding operation (AFO) assessment team is working feverishly to reach a target of 2,000 completed assessments by January 15, 2002.

"We have to get busy," said Ray Loveless, AFO inventory coordinator, Utah Association of Conservation Districts.

Utah's AFO strategy sets a date of March 2003 for completion of all AFO assessments throughout the state. The January 2002 goal is designed to impress state lawmakers into continuing to fund AFO projects during the 2002-2003 fiscal year. Last year the Utah Legislature came up with \$400,000. Since that time however, a sharp economic downturn and increased funding for Olympics security and ongoing security have resulted in two four percent state agency budget cuts in the past six months.

Proponents of Utah's AFO Strategy have been very aggressive at promoting the opportunity the strategy gives producers to cleanup problems they have as potential Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and avoid regulation.

"There are ways they [EPA] could deal with it [CAFO designations] that are not as friendly as how we will deal with it," Loveless proclaimed in a recent meeting with soil conservation district supervisors and staff. "The potential CAFO designation is the big difference between Utah's strategy and other AFO/CAFO strategies," he said. "we provide the window of opportunity to come into compliance before even becoming considered as a CAFO."

It's a difference that has garnered Utah national recognition.

Speaking in Wyoming recently to Western agriculture and environmental leaders, EPA administrator Christine Todd Whitman applauded a cooperative spirit she sees between EPA and some of the states in the West. "I recognize that agriculture is impacted by decisions made by EPA and working together is the best way for us to address the issues," Whitman pointed out. "I am happy with the direction Region 8 is moving and the relationship between our agency and the states. I would like to replicate this relationship in other regions across the U. S."

Acting EPA regional administrator for Region VIII, Jack McGraw, spoke even more specifically about Utah's AFO/CAFO effort. "Utah has been a leader in developing a state AFO/CAFO strategy that is reflective of farmers and ranchers needs." "The Utah AFO/CAFO Strategy that incorporates a voluntary, incentive-based approach has been identified as a national model," McGraw said.

Despite regional and national bureaucratic support many Utah farmers and ranchers are still reluctant to open their operations up to scrutiny. That's one reason Utah Farm Bureau and local soil conservation district personnel are conducting many of the assessment. Members of agricultural commodity associations such as the Utah Cattlemen's Association and the Dairy Farmers of Utah are also conducting assessments.

Dee Waldren, a dairy farmer from Morgan, Utah, had one of the earliest assessments conducted in the state. He said that the process was informative and virtually painless. "I think it's something they [farmers and ranchers] worry about more than they should," Waldren said. "It gives people a goal and gives them time to accomplish it.

"They just have to be open minded. There's not a negative aspect at all," Waldren asserted.

It's also a fairly quick process, Waldren added. "It took 15-20 minutes to walk though my whole place."

Waldren had completed some renovations prior to the AFO assessment. Historically an irrigation ditch ran through the feed yard of his 100 cow dairy. Rain and snow melt runoff from the corral into the live water source makes Waldren's farm a potential CAFO. While Waldren had piped some of the water running through the corral, the AFO assessment some problems that still exist and additional work that Waldren needs to complete.

Waldren said every assessment done in his county has been that easy. While every assessment in Wasatch County is done and Morgan County is well on its way to being complete, for example, other counties have a long way to go.

For those operations designated as CAFOs or potential CAFOs, there will be a chance to attend a comprehensive nutrient management planning (CMNP) training. The full day training will take place in several locations throughout Utah. Operators will have a chance to develop their CNMPs in the presence of experts.

It should save the few certified CNMP experts in the state a lot of time. It will also allow farmers and ranchers to see that other people have similar problems. A schedule for those training sessions should be out by January.

As for the AFO assessment process, Loveless maintains that the goal of 2,000 assessments by January 15<sup>th</sup> is reachable.

“We just have to commit ourselves to doing it and work hard,” he concluded.

For more information about animal feeding operation assessments contact your local soil conservation district or Ray Loveless at (801) 229-3838.